

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Renalda Hasting has been selected as the 2015 White Mountain Apache Tribal Region First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.



The awareness-raising efforts Hasting has demonstrated include:

- working for the Rainbow Treatment Center by providing a level of services designed to meet the needs of parents and grandparents caring for their children. Helping host an information table at a community event.
- Served as a First Things First Regional Council member.
- Attending training on early childhood messaging.
- Supports the children in the White Mountain Apache Tribal Region through her employment by offering workshops to parents, families, and caregivers about the importance of early childhood development.
- Involved in providing workshops on a variety of topics, such as working with families in stressful situations, working with parents around issues of discipline, and the benefits of reading aloud to children.
- Creates awareness about and shares information on behalf of First Things First and identifies opportunities for staff to present information about the importance of early childhood development to individuals and groups.
- Serves as a resource to individuals or groups who have concerns and interest in the overall development of a child.

We recently caught up with Hastings, who works as Behavioral Health Technician.

**Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?**

**Answer:** Children are given the opportunity to learn to develop relationships with adults and other children in a safe and nurturing environment. The mind of a child, the neurological development is greatly being stimulated through reading, storytelling, coloring, recognizing letters, shapes and numbers. This has a huge impact on their cognitive development. Fostering of a child's social and emotional development is also being stimulated, learning to complete and accomplish goal related tasks, learning to share with other peers. Children are given the opportunity to establish a routine, which is important in establishing a positive self-image and esteem.

**Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness of early childhood issues?**

**A:** Having a daughter of my own and having her involved in an early childhood program made me see that she was excelling in language and reading, also in her coordination and social skills. Having my child in an early childhood program that fostered her overall development and provided the utmost care was

the best thing I did for my child. I have seen how an early childhood program can be productive for a child's overall development and at the same time benefit the parents. Increasing public awareness about the positive outcomes of early childhood programs is one way that I express my gratitude for investing in my child's development and experiencing the positive outcomes within my child.

**Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?**

**A:** The earliest years of a child's life are key to predicting ultimate success in a child's schooling and in their life. Early learning experiences are very crucial in determining factors relating to emotional, social and intellectual development and how they will perform in school. I feel that children who come from low economic status are at greater risk of abuse, neglect, hunger and possibly deprived of obtaining early childhood programming. Every child should be given the opportunity to gain a healthy start. With awareness and education, children at risk can be given the opportunity to gain that healthy start.

**Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?**

**A:** I have seen some progress and movement, such as establishing some programs targeted at early childhood development, but I feel that more improvements can be made. I would like to strive for better awareness of early childhood programs and at the same time see more establishment of early childhood programming.

**Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?**

**A:** There are several ways to get community members involved, depending on their comfort level:

- Encouraging parents/community members to volunteer in their child's classroom or early childhood program.
- Serving as an advocate to stress the importance of early childhood programming.
- Being an active supporter by becoming involved in activities relating to early childhood programs.
- Encouraging parents/community members to provide feedback on their child's early childhood program; offer ideas, comments, suggestions on the positive aspects of the programs and how the program can improve.

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**About First Things First** – First Things First is a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten. Decisions about how those funds are spent are made by local councils staffed by community volunteers. To learn more, visit [azftf.gov](http://azftf.gov).